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## COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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### **DMME Sets Public Hearing on Amendments to Coal Mine Safety Regulations**

*-Regulations govern vertical ventilation holes and mining near gas and oil wells  
and the use of diesel powered equipment in underground coal mines -*

**Richmond, VA** – A public hearing on proposed language to amend state coal mine safety regulations will be held on January 25, 2001 in Big Stone Gap, VA, the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) announced today. The public hearing will be held at 10 a.m. at DMME's Buchanan-Smith Office Building located at 3405 Mountain Empire Road, adjacent to the Mountain Empire Community College campus.

The proposed amendments include new language to replace existing regulations governing vertical ventilation holes and mining near gas and oil wells. Also proposed are amendments to rules and regulations governing the use of diesel powered equipment in underground coal mines. Both proposed amendments were published in the Virginia Register of Regulations on December 18, 2000.

The proposed replacement regulation for vertical ventilation holes will govern the drilling, equipping, operating and plugging of the holes, which are used to ventilate methane gas from underground coal mines to the atmosphere. It also will govern the practice of mining near or through a vertical ventilation hole or gas well. Use of vertical ventilation holes affects the safety of underground miners through the removal of explosive methane gas from the mine atmosphere. Safety is also affected by the potential hazards associated with mining activity occurring in close proximity to the vertical ventilation holes and gas wells. Sufficient barrier must be left around the wells to ensure that

underground miners don't accidentally mine into the wells. The regulations also are necessary to protect the welfare of citizens having interests in the vicinity of a location of a vertical ventilation hole.

The proposed regulation will also streamline the regulatory process, eliminate unnecessary regulatory requirements, clarify language, and implement changes based on the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy's, mine operators', coal miners' and citizens' experiences in implementing the regulations, which were last amended in 1991.

DMME is proposing to amend rules and regulations governing the use of diesel-powered equipment in underground coal mines to ensure that coal mining is performed safely, efficiently and in a manner that most benefits the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the Commonwealth. The proposed amendments were recommended by the mining industry, stakeholders, and DMME's customers.

The regulation is needed to ensure diesel equipment is safely operated and maintained and that underground miners are protected from the effects of diesel exhaust. The regulation addresses general requirements, operation and maintenance, ventilation, air quality, fire protection, and diesel fuel standards.

Amendments to the regulation are needed to address hazards not addressed by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), reflect recent amendments to, and avoid conflicts with, MSHA regulations and federal law, reflect changes in technology, and eliminate duplicative requirements. These revisions, along with less substantive ones, were recommended by the industry and labor representatives that served on the regulatory review committee. The goals of the proposed regulation are to protect miners from diesel exhaust, which may pose health hazards to workers, and to encourage productive mining through the efficient uses of diesel-powered equipment.

Public comments on the proposed amendments may be submitted until 5 p.m. February 16, 2001 to Frank A. Linkous, Division Chief, Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Division of Mines, 3405 Mountain Empire Road, P.O. Drawer 900, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219, (276) 523-8224, Fax (276) 523-8239 or toll free 1-800-828-1120 (Virginia Relay Center).

Special accommodations for the disabled will be made available at the hearing on request. Anyone needing special accommodations should contact the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy by January 18, 2001 by calling the Virginia Relay Center TTY/TDD 1-800-821-1120 or 1140.

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